New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

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1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1946 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
Androcles and the Lion	217
*Annie Get Your Gun	382
Another Part of the Forest	247
Beggar's Holiday	204
*Born Yesterday	466
*Burlesque	208
*Call Me Mister	403
Christopher Blake	233
Cyrano de Bergerac	321
Fatal Weakness (The)	251
*Happy Birthday	280
Henry VIII	271
Iceman Cometh (The)	315
Joan of Lorraine	255
John Gabriel Borkman	263
Lady Windermere's Fan	307
Lovely Me	211
Made In Heaven	292
O Mistress Mine	474
Park Avenue	275
Playboy of the Western World (The)	287
Pound on Demand	217
Present Laughter	283
Show Boat	496
Temper the Wind	197
Toplitzky of Notre Dame	201
What Every Woman Knows	268
Wonderful Journey	214
Years Ago	229

1945 Vol.

Carousel	226
Red Mill (The)	141
State of the Union	102

1944 Vol.

Anna Lucasta	143
*Harvey	95

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

Life With Father	457

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 27, 1947

1947 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1947

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Alice in Wonderland	398
*All My Sons	475
*Allegro	300
As You Like It	451
Barefoot Boy With Cheek	402
Bathsheba	415
Big Two (The)	494
*Brigadoon	427
Chocolate Soldier (The)	431
*Command Decision	328
Craig's Wife	457
Dear Judas	315
*Druid Circle (The)	288
Duet for Two Hands	312
Eagle Has Two Heads (The)	421
*Finian's Rainbow	486
Hamlet	447
Heads or Tails	377
*Heiress (The)	335
*High Button Shoes	304
*How I Wonder	332
I Gotta Get Out	343
Importance of Being Earnest (The)	439
*Inspector Calls (An)	291
It Takes Two	469
*John Loves Mary	465
King Lear	453
Laura	353
Little A	483
Louisiana Lady	362
Love for Love	367
Love Goes to Press	497
Magic Touch (The)	348
*Man and Superman	308
*Medea	295
*Medium (The)	379
Merchant of Venice (The)	450
Message for Margaret	393
Miracle in the Mountains	387
*Music In My Heart	324
Open House	359
*Our Lan'	339
Parlor Story	436
Portrait in Black	371
Story of Mary Surratt (The)	461
Street Scene	490
Sweethearts	479
*Telephone (The)	379
Tenting Tonight	406
Under the Counter	320
Volpone	448
Whole World Over (The)	411
Yellow Jack	443
*Young Man's Fancy (A)	383

Critics' Circle Award 392

Pulitzer Award 376

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 27, 1947

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Medea"

"The Druid Circle"

"An Inspector Calls"

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Druid Circle"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 23, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

Full of Ragged Stones

JOHN VAN DRUTEN has gone back into misty memories in "The Druid Circle." His new play at the Morosco marshals an impressive cast and has moments of stern emphasis as he deals with academic decay in a small university town near Wales in the early 1920s. What with Leo G. Carroll giving an impressive performance of the leading role, and Ethel Griffies and Susan Douglas contributing vast assistance in what can only be called anomolous parts, this Alfred de Liagre jr. production has a certain emotional power. But it goes off in so many directions at such length that it is a tiresome offering.

* * *

The author may have had something important to communicate when he first thought up the drama, but he has let it slip through his fingers in a disorganized and random script. His attack on the impotence of higher education is phrased with indignation and eloquence as he is contemplating the humiliation of a couple of adolescents. It reaches fine promise when a dessicated professor is hoist by his own petard in attempting to realize the impulses of youth vicariously. Where there should have been clarity and tragic dignity, one is offered considerable confusion.

* * *

Carroll is equal to the difficult task that is imposed on him in "The Druid Circle." As the villainous pedagogue, who is forced to admit that youth was neither well served nor loved by its Druidical mentors some decades ago, he has a gaunt insistence in his every appearance on stage which gives lucidity to turbid passages. He has never failed an assignment yet. He is very good indeed in "The Druid Circle." Next to him note Miss Griffies, as the professor's wise old mother, given no more than a shining moment of consequence in the drama.

* * *

When they are on stage together there is an undercurrent of meaning to the Van Druten work which rarely emerges on the surface. They represent the period which the author was trying to recollect, but there is not enough of a play to sustain their efforts. Boyd Crawford is all right as the young colleague of the aging academic tyrant and Neva Patterson makes the most of her small part as his actress wife. Stewart Chaney has given the show a resplendent decor and the author has staged it with too careful attention to his writing.

'THE DRUID CIRCLE.'

Play by John van Druten; settings and lighting by Stewart Chaney; staged by John van Druten; presented by Alfred de Liagre Jr. at the Morosco Theater Wednesday evening, October 22, 1947. The cast:

Miss Dagwall	Lillian Bronson
Professor White	Leo G. Carroll
Professor Parry Phillips	Noel Leslie
Maddox	Boyd Crawford
Tobin	Aidan Turner
Tom Lloyd-Ellis	Walter Starkey
Megan Lewis	Susan Douglas
Brenda Maddox	Neva Patterson
Mrs. White	Ethel Griffies
Miss Trevelyan	Merle Maddern
Blodwen	Cherry Hardy

SYNOPSIS: The action passes in the early 1920s in a small university town near the borders of England and Wales. Act I, Scene 1: The Senior Common Room. Mid-morning, Wednesday. Scene 2: The Maddoxes' Flat. Late the same afternoon. Act II. Professor White's Flat. Saturday afternoon. Act III, Scene 1: The Senior Common Room. Tuesday morning. Scene 2: The Maddoxes Flat. Tuesday evening.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 23, 1947

'The Druid Circle' Is Disappointing

By ROBERT COLEMAN

John Van Druten's new play, "The Druid Circle," arrived at the Morosco Theatre last evening, after a tune-up tour on the road, and proved a disappointment. Like "Young Woodley," it has to do with youthful romance at school.

The mood of "Young Woodley" was sensitively bittersweet, that of "The Druid Circle" brutally bitter. Young Woodley sustained a bruise on his heart that would mend without a scar. Tom Lloyd-Ellis and Megan Lewis sustain bruises to their souls that promise to leave permanent welts.

The new piece is an indictment of English teachers driven to wretchedness by poor pay, an unprogressive school system and dull routine. In time they come to hate rather than understand their youthful pupils.

The love of Tom for Megan was decent, until sadistic Professor White found and read a letter from Tom to her. He then made the boy read it aloud before the girl. Crushed by White's cruel indecency, Megan almost committed suicide.

In the end Megan returned to school where sympathetic instructor Maddox and his actress wife did all in their power to take the sting out of White's stupid action and restore a normal relationship to the young lovers.

Van Druten, usually light of hand, has invested "The Druid Circle" with too many leaden, stocky scenes and his usually admirable sense of direction is currently absent. He started with the materials for an absorbing theatre piece, but has made them flare into amusing comedy and gripping drama too seldom.

Leo G. Carroll, one of the nicest people in the theatre, is called upon to act the harsh, obtuse Professor White, who had not had a happy married life. That he makes you mildly loath the old cuss is a tribute to Carroll's artistry.

A personal triumph was scored by Ethel Griffies, as White's aged, crochety, sensible mother.

Producer Alfred de Liagre, Jr., has given "The Druid Circle" the benefit of atmospheric sets by Stewart Chaney, but Van Druten has failed to fill them with a first rate play.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 23, 1947

'Druid Circle' Lashes Weak School Systems

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

John van Druten's new play concerns the constricted life in a university in south England. "The Druid Circle" is the faculty, and the story describes the inhibitions, gossip and ugly sublimation that can exist in such surroundings.

In one sense, the play is a condemnation of educational systems anywhere, left by society to the weaklings and the misfits. Here the one hope of the younger professors is to get out and avoid becoming what the older ones are.

It is a story of suffocated emotion with curious and macabre hold on the attention. It seems to take place inside a delicate eggshell or under the thinnest sheet of ice. It never quite comes through its transparent caul to clutch or crash one's emotions.

Persecutes Students.

The central figure is one Prof. White, sensitive enough of his own shortcomings to stultify in jealousy the chances of anyone else achieving a richer life than he has.

With sere jealousy he apologizes his way out of recommending a younger professor for a post at Oxford. In envious memory of his own unfulfilled youth, he persecutes two students because he cannot face the fact that they are genuinely in love.

It is frightening that his hypocrisy can be allowed to exert such sadism, but he forces the youngster to read aloud a most personal letter to the girl he loves, in front of himself and the girl.

Inverted Grudge.

This action almost has tragic results, and his fear of the consequences brings him to as much of his normal senses as are left.

The drama is told in understated terms that never quite come to grips with its problem. The professor's inverted grudge against healthy consummated lives spreads its own disease by contact. But the play never reveals true dramatic results of his invidious frustrations.

His conversion in the end is not clearly motivated, as there has been no previous suggestion that he was capable of appreciating what stultification and hurt he caused.

Leo G. Carroll is the widowed professor around whom the play revolves. He gives the role the wrung dry stubbornness it demands.

Sharp as a Bodkin.

Standing out in the cast around him is Ethel Griffies, playing his gossipy mother. She is sharp as a bodkin as the selfish bored old woman, who sees through her son, but has little to live for except the juicy tribulations of the neighborhood.

Neva Patterson is not only beautiful, but warm and gracious as the young teacher's wife. She has all the humorous calm and electric-eye appreciation of the Candida she was to have played for the faculty drama society.

Boyd Crawford makes the younger teacher agreeable and healthy, and Susan Douglas and Walter Starkey are the tense distraught young lovers.

Lillian Bronson has some pathetically comic moments as a teacher who is fitted and destined to remain at the university, and Merle Maddern plays gratifyingly straight as a matron of girl students who knows her duty.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 23, 1947

Young Sex, Elderly Repressions Tangle Gently in 'Druid Circle'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "The Druid Circle" John van Druten has dropped, for the moment, his consideration of sex among adults in a modern world and has gone back to the time—the early 20s—and the theme—sex among adolescents—with which he was preoccupied when he wrote his first success, "Young Woodley."

Van Druten, then an instructor in Wales, told of the disapproval of normal youthful instincts by the soured elders in charge of a school. Such bluenoses, such killjoys, apparently are called the Druid Circle in English scholastic life; and the new play, which was handsomely presented last evening at the Morosco, takes up where van Druten had left off more than 20 years ago.

It shows the same earnest sympathy for the problems of youth; it is a sincere drama and sometimes a moving one; it is skillfully played by a well chosen company under the author's direction, and in it Ethel Griffies returns to Broadway after seventeen years of absence to score a solid personal hit as a strong-minded old lady.

Maybe It's Age.

I felt, though, that "The Druid Circle" was not holding me as intensely as I remember "Young Woodley" did. This may be because I am now used to a different stage tempo—or that I am 23 years older and ready to join the Druid Circle myself. I felt last evening that Mr. van Druten's preoccupation with the gossip, small scandals and mental dry rot of a second-rate university was of less moment to me than it should have been.

The symbol of repression in "Woodley" was a headmaster, with whose wife a young student falls in love. In "The Druid Circle" he is a middle-aged embittered professor who hates youth just because it is youth. This role is played with the usual skill of Leo G. Carroll—and there is no more careful and skillful player to be found hereabouts. Mr. Carroll admits no compromise in undertaking a hateful part.

Love Wins Again.

The story concerns the touching, profound love of two students, and the discovery by the professor of a love letter which shocks his loveless nature. He puts the young people through a harrowing humiliation but in the end goes down to defeat.

Van Druten himself seems to be a character in the play, for in it is a lecturer still young enough to have hope for his own future and wise enough to loathe the narrow and deadening life of the university. Boyd Crawford portrays the lecturer with a modest and engaging sincerity.

Among the other players are Lillian Bronson as a skittish young spinster, Merle Maddern as a prim headmistress and Neva Patterson as the young lecturer's handsome ex-actress wife. The love story is touchingly played by Walter Starkey and Susan Douglas; but, being an incipient member of the Druid Circle, I felt now and again that the young lovers were just a little too starry-eyed, a little too pure of heart and simple of mind, for even the 1920s.

PM

OCTOBER 24, 1947

Kronenberger

An Interesting Try That Doesn't Quite Come Off

Mr. van Druten's latest play, set in a small British university during the 1920's, cannot but remind many people of his famous first play, *Young Woodley*. But it might also, and more significantly, remind us in what a wide arc Mr. van Druten has traveled before returning to something like home base; how varied his undertakings have been; and how, time and again, he has been willing to risk a failure rather than merely repeat a success. There have been no echoes of the turtle's voice; no addenda to remembering Mama; nor could *The Druid Circle* have ever been called *Old Woodley*.

• • •

That it also cannot quite be called a success is something to be really sorry about; and often for what it achieves as well as for what it attempts. Mr. van Druten has done much more than take a serious theme and write seriously about it. He has taken a very interesting theme and, quite often, written very interestingly about it. His feeling for his subject gives *The Druid Circle*, in its best moments, real character. His expert sense of theater gives the play, in a number of passages, real punch. Yet the play is unsatisfying. This is in some degree because parts of it don't come off. But it is rather more because parts of it, however sound in themselves, don't fit together with other parts. The play lacks concentration, lacks unity of feeling. And even more disturbingly, it lacks unity of tone.

• • •

Mr. van Druten is writing of the dry-rot and repressiveness in a terribly provincial university; and in great particular of a middle-aged professor, a sterile husk of a man who looks with envious, rancorous eyes at youth. When a highly personal love-letter written by one student to another falls into Professor White's hands, he makes the cruelest possible weapon of it, finally forcing the boy who wrote it to read it aloud, in an agony of embarrassment and shame, to the girl it was written to. The scene almost has tragic consequences, but matters end happily enough, with even the professor rather conscience-stricken.

• • •

There is, as you can see, no great amount of story in *The Druid Circle;* and to make a full-sized play, Mr. van Druten has chosen rather to broaden his picture of university life than to deepen his portrait of Professor White. There are pleasantly satiric (if rather facile) scenes involving stock university characters and situations; there are pleasantly human scenes involving a healthy young professor and his wife who befriend the badgered pair and who want to climb out of the academic bog as fast as possible. And these scenes work, for the most part, against the dominant mood of the play, which should be more intense than it is, and which should certainly be more austere. For Professor White is not presented as just one among many victims of provincial dry-rot; he is a naturally sterile human being, a man whose terrible hatred of youth is not for something he has lost but for something he has never had. Consequently he is not a pathetic but a pathological figure; and in that sense *The Druid Circle* —all the more because of its academic background—becomes a sort of *Children's Hour* in reverse.

Indeed, the climaxes of the two plays are almost equally intolerable situations to watch; and the fact that Mr. van Druten's letter-reading scene, however honestly written, never sloughs off what is merely painful about it in favor of what is also dramatic, is due to our not having been gradually lifted up to it by what went before. Far too much of what went before is slack and mild and unconcerned with drama. The play asks for a much more dramatic method of attack, for a much more consistent exertion of pressure. Even the most effective scene of the evening—that between the Professor and his indomitable mother—isn't "serious" enough for the point at which it comes in the play. Nor has the ending much fibre.

• • •

Not everything about the production is happy, either; although Mr. van Druten's staging is smooth, and Leo Carroll's playing of the Professor excellent. Mr. Carroll plays with an ingrained, never obtrusive understanding of the role, and with an instinct for shading that is very fine; and Ethel Griffies offers a delightful performance as the Professor's mother. In the parts of the young professor and his wife and the unhappy lovers, Boyd Crawford, Neva Patterson, Walter Starkey and Susan Douglas all give eager and attractive performances that, for all that, are not quite right. It is, indeed, the all-round jinx of *The Druid Circle* that it should be slightly off-key, slightly out of kilter, at a level of writing where such things are terribly costly.—LOUIS KRONENBERGER.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 23, 1947

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

After he has gotten a trifling first act out of the way, John van Druten goes straight to the heart of one of his best dramas. "The Druid Circle" he calls it; it was capitally acted at the Morosco last evening. Like "Young Woodley," it is a play about young people in school, based no doubt on Mr. van Druten's personal experiences as a pedagogue.

In comparison with the first play that brought a fresh talent and an attractive personality into our theatre two decades ago, "The Druid Circle" is a mature piece of work—light in touch, but compassionate in attitude and critical of the inhumanity of old people towards the young. It is the story of a sour and arid English professor who very nearly wrecks the lives of two students who are in love.

* * *

He is Professor White of the history department. Prowling among the notebooks of one of the students, he finds a love-letter written to one of the girls by one of the boys. They very quickly realize that he has it. Out of middle-aged malice, he tortures them in silence for a day or two. Then, in an especially agonizing scene, he compels the boy to read it aloud to the girl in his presence. In the acting of Leo Carroll as the professor and Walter Starkey and Susan Douglas as the boy and girl, this is a terribly moving scene that suddenly brings a loose play taut and alive and changes the lives of all the characters. Mr. van Druten's general point is that life in a university community often breeds an elusive hatred of the young. "The Druid Circle" proves the point. As a mature dramatist, Mr. van Druten makes his characters suffer the consequences.

* * *

He also has the skill to direct a stirring performance. Among other things, it adds something memorable to Mr. Carroll's career. For a number of seasons Broadway has admired him as an adroitly comic actor of attenuated roles. In "The Druid Circle" he is cast as curmudgeon with none of the graces of humor or sentiment. The part is dour. Mr. Carroll acts it admirably. Impassive on the surface, he conveys the interior turmoil of a thinking man who, in the last scene, achieves a sort of lonely valor. His acting is a little masterpiece of character portraiture from the inside out.

There is another treasure. As the professor's tart and knowing mother, Ethel Griffies gives a finely-wrought performance full of theatrical sapience. For Miss Griffies is mistress of the stage when she is on it and knows when and how to give a line its full meaning. Although Boyd Crawford has not shaken all the juvenility out of his system yet, he does well with the part of a young professor when the play gets down to business in the second act. Neva Patterson as the young professor's wife does not have to wait for the play to catch up with her. As far as content is concerned, the part is slight, but she plays it with style and sympathy from the beginning.

* * *

As the unfortunate students, Mr. Starkey and Miss Douglas may seem a trifle overeager when the play is kind to them—sweet even for teacher's pets. But they rise to the occasion in the poignant scenes with some deeply-felt acting. Lillian Bronson as a frail and simpering spinster, Merle Maddern as a strong one, Noel Leslie as a fussy old teacher and Aidan Turner as a rebellious young teacher complete an excellent cast. Although one of Stewart Chaney's bookcase and fireplace sets is interior decoration, his sets for the senior common room and Professor White's living room capture the mood of the play as well as the worn look of places of learning.

In one of his best plays, Mr. van Druten has added to the familiar neatness of his craftsmanship a knowledge of people caught in the backwaters of modern life and he is writing about them with a humane point of view. He has written cleverer plays but none better than "The Druid Circle."

The Sun

OCTOBER 23, 1947

'The Druid Circle' Literate, Well-acted Play of English University Life.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

John van Druten, an interesting and frequently brilliant worker in our theater, goes back to English university life and to something of the mood of "Young Woodley" in his writing of "The Druid Circle," a slight but penetrating and engrossing piece, submitted last evening at the Morosco.

The author of "The Voice of the Turtle" and "I Remember Mama," now concerned with pedagogic problems, again reveals his perception as a dramatist and as a director. His "Druid Circle" is admirably played and it belongs with the best of the plays that he has bestowed upon Broadway over the past twenty years.

Van Druten's principal character is the bitter, prying, sex-frustrated Prof. White. He resents youth and reveals an inordinate curiosity about the morals of his students. He comes upon a love letter written by one student to another and he subjects the boy who wrote it to the terrible ordeal of reading the letter aloud in the presence of the girl to whom it had been sent. The hysterical girl vanishes and is gone for several days. The ruction that is brought on forces the resignation of the meddling professor, who represents the antediluvian elements in the faculty.

"The Druid Circle" is a play of numerous advantages: smooth staging from the author, an excellent production from Alfred de Liagre Jr. and several first-rate performances. Leo G. Carroll, a technician and a perfectionist, brings all his skill to his playing of the fusty, thwarted professor, a pathetic figure in the crushing defeat resulting from his clash with youth. Carroll is a character actor with something of the finesse of the master, George Arliss.

Some of Van Druten's best writing has gone into his creation of the professor's venerable, cackling, querulous mother, who understands him if nobody else does. It's a part delightfully played by Ethel Griffies. She's so very good the thoughts of many of us were turning last night to Louise Closser Hale.

Neva Patterson, with scant Broadway experience, has poise, charm and believeability in the role of the wife of a young lecturer, who is fighting against getting into an academic rut. Boyd Crawford is thoroughly convincing as the lecturer-husband. Walter Starkey is effective as the impetuous letter writer and so is Susan Douglas as the girl who flees. There is a brisk performance from Aidan Turner and a fluttery one from Lillian Bronson, playing the faculty spinster. Stewart Chaney's realistic settings are fine.

"The Druid Circle" is a literate, steadily engrossing play, it brings forth fluent and intelligent writing, and it again shows the professional New York theater in fine form.

New York Post

OCTOBER 23, 1947

Van Druten's New Play Expertly Written

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

There is something immensely satisfying in the sight of an expert and intelligent theatrical craftsman like John van Druten at work, even when his play leaves one or two things to be desired. In "The Druid Circle," Mr. van Druten is contemplating the frustrations of academic life in Wales in the early '20s, and his story suffers from an inability to lift itself beyond its somewhat parochial quality and atmosphere. Yet so sharply, maturely and understandingly and with such sure appreciation of character and motives is the entire narrative set down that what is almost a one-incident drama manages to be steadily interesting.

There are few more unappetizing characters in the modern drama than the dull and small-minded professor of history whom the author, obviously from a somber recollection of his own academic days, has chosen for his central figure. A bitter, dried-up, envious and emotionally sterile pedant, with a deep hatred for youth and the mind of the sadist, this cruel and sarcastic old man might seem possible in the theatre only as a clown or a monster. As he emerges in "The Druid Circle," he is something of both, but over and beyond that he becomes, thanks to the skillful writing of Mr. van Druten and the characteristically brilliant acting of Leo G. Carroll, a completely understandable and, in the end, almost pathetic human being.

Painful Scene

If "The Druid Circle" contains the season's least admirable central character it likewise offers the year's most cruel and painful scene. It arrives when the professor comes upon a letter that one of the boys in the college has written to one of the girls. It is a foolish and extravagant letter, and the professor, out of the knowledge that he himself was never capable of the passion it revealed, forces the boy to read it aloud in the presence of the girl, as both students writhe in agonies of shame. It is certainly not an episode that anyone is likely to enjoy, but it is managed with a skill and truth which make it inescapably impressive.

Although Mr. van Druten's is not a pleasant story, save in the poetic justice of its conclusion, it has its admirable comedy aspects, which are all the more commendable because they fit into the narrative so shrewdly and add so much to its development of character. The relationship between the professor and his ancient mother, which might easily have been the customary silver cord thing, becomes a complete delight, because the old lady, superbly played by Ethel Griffies, turns out to be a wonderfully scornful beldame, and a comic joy of the season.

Other Characters

While the mother is the fresh-

est creation in the play, all of the other characters, even such a nominally conventional figure as a shy old maid teacher bewildered by sex, have freshness and reality. In particular, the rebellious young faculty member and his young actress wife are splendidly drawn, with their domestic relationship given a credibility rare in such roles. This attractive young married pair are delightfully played by Boyd Crawford and Neva Patterson. Miss Patterson, by the way, proves herself a talented and charming actress, whose future in the theatre seems a bright one.

Mr. Carroll, Miss Griffies, Mr. Crawford and Miss Patterson are especially fine in their roles, and so is Walter Starkey as the young student bullied by the professor. There are also helpful performances by Lillian Bronson as the shy teacher and Merle Maddern as the headmistress. Stewart Chaney's sets help make the academic atmosphere of the play so credible. "The Druid Circle" is no dramatic epic, but its expertness is a pleasure.

Journal American

OCTOBER 23, 1947

Talky Tempest Tells Practically Nothing

By ROBERT GARLAND

As if we weren't getting enough of these oh-so-English plays direct from dear old England, John van Druten has tried his hand at running one up at home here in the U. S. A. It's "The Druid Circle" I've got in mind.

This sample of Mr. van Druten's home-work was produced last night at the Morosco Theatre by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., in the presence of a first night audience that gave the impression of having been produced by John C. Wilson.

The exhibit, like the English bishop's egg, is good in spots. But, for the most part, "The Druid Circle" is pre-"Young Woodley" stuff, a talky tempest in a university tea cup where almost nothing happens for three acts and five scenes.

Even the quaintly comic characters the dramatist has pencilled in with professional assurance—the mother, the spinster, the campus busybody—are out of the drama's stockroom, diverting as they are.

But, with them or without, John van Druten's "The Druid Circle" remains an oh-so-English problem play about a minor problem, remote in time and physically far away.

• • •

And—so What?

The time: 1920's. The place: a university town near the borders of England and Wales. The problem: how to modernize the faculty in general, Professor White in particular. So what? you ask. So what, indeed!

Nevertheless, downstairs, upstairs, in the professor's chambers, the problem is gone into. The faculty, especially Professor White, turns it inside out. The students, especially Tom and Megan, turn it upside down.

But, inside out or upside down, nothing much is settled. Professor White remains a frustrated schoolma'am, a sex-starved sadist, a mamma's boy at the age of fifty and an unpleasant person to have around a university.

Through his maladjusted machinations he darn near wrecks the love affair of Tom and Megan. He, believe me, hangs around the university and suffers. She, believe her, runs off to Wales and suicide.

In the end, however, boy gets girl, girl gets boy and the professor gets his well deserved comeuppance. And a nice couple called Maddox get a call to Oxford.

• • •

Not Vastly Liked

As far as 1947, the U. S. A. and Broadway are concerned, "The Druid Circle" remains a "So-What?" drama. Even last night's hands-across-the-sea, why-Noel-dear-how-are-you? congregation couldn't find it vastly to their liking.

And I don't find it remarkably well acted. Leo G. Carroll plays George Apley all over again, adding a Welsh-English accent whenever he thinks about it. And Lillian Bronson's Miss Dagnall is Mildred Natwick.

Frankly, it's Ethel Griffies as Mrs. White who holds the acting honors. And the Maddox of Boyd Crawford, the Megan of Susan Douglas and the Tom of Walter Starkey are the natural runners-up. And the Brenda Maddox of Neva Patterson.

John van Druten himself has prompted the direction which, being the author's, must be what he calls for. The settings by Stewart Chaney are, no doubt, redolent of the borderland of England-into-Wales. But they, too, seem far away . . .

As a former lecurer at the university at Aberystwyth, "The Druid Circle" may well be John van Druten's first play. If so, he's a promising young oh-so-English playwright.

"An Inspector Calls"

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 22, 1947

'An Inspector Calls' Gripping in Spots

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "An Inspector Calls" J. B. Priestley has attempted unsuccessfully to combine the best features of "Outward Bound," "Reigen," "The Servant in the House," "Dear Brutus," "The Deluge," and a soapbox. But a fine cast and the admirable direction of Cedric Hardwicke do much to hide its deficiencies.

The play opens at a dinner in the home of mill owner Arthur Birling celebrating the engagement of his daughter to the son of his most important industrial rival. Enter a police inspector to announce that a girl has committed suicide, leaving a diary implicating all present at the festivities.

Birling has fired the girl for leading a strike for higher wages, his daughter has driven her from another job through pique, his son-in-law-to-be has kept her pregnant and his wife's aid society has spurned her plea for relief.

The lot of them feel rather shabby over the mess until it is discovered that their visitor is not a real, badge-carrying inspector. Then all return to their selfish, arrogant ways except the daughter and son, who continue to experience remorse for their misdeeds, though apparently safe from exposure.

The phone rings. A girl has really committed suicide and a genuine police inspector is bound for the Birling home to ask some questions.

Due to the excellent acting of Thomas Mitchell, Melville Cooper, Doris Lloyd, Rene Ray, John Buckmaster and John Merivale, under the coaching of Hardwicke, "An Inspector Calls" has a goodly quota of gripping, suspenseful moments.

A handsome, atmospheric period setting, circa 1912, by Stewart Chaney also is helpful.

But the drama is weakened by the wabbling course it steers and the inability to set a mood that is either supernatural or real.

It is quite possible that the Birlings and their guests were all active in sending a single person to doom, but Priestley never made it seem plausible to us.

And the third act is compounded of quicksand, with its rapid shifts from reality to illusion and back again. But Hardwicke's cast moved with more facility and honesty through quicksand than the author.

It is easy to understand why Courtney Burr and Lassor H. Grosberg thought "An Inspector Calls" worth producing. It is packed with interesting ideas, but they already have been treated more expertly by others.

'AN INSPECTOR CALLS.'

Play by J. B. Priestley; directed by Cedric Hardwicke; setting, costumes and lighting by Stewart Chaney; presented by Courtney Burr and Lassor H. Grosberg at the Booth Theater Tuesday evening, October 21, 1947. The cast:

Arthur Birling ..... Melville Cooper
Gerald Croft ..... John Buckmaster
Sheila Birling ..... Rene Ray
Sybil Birling ..... Doris Lloyd
Edna ..... Patricia Marmont
Eric Birling ..... John Merivale
Inspector Goole ..... Thomas Mitchell

SYNOPSIS: It is an evening in spring, 1912. All three acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining room of the Birlings' house in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands.

"An Inspector Calls"—*continued*

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 22, 1947

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Something to See

A GROUP of exciting period characterizations, an impeccable production and a literate script make "An Inspector Calls" something more than an ordinary melodrama. The new J. B. Priestley play at the Booth has laggard moments, but it has an over-all tension which carries it through three acts of continuous exposition with considerable power. In a somewhat mystical fable about a suicide in the North Midlands in 1912, the author has conceived sense in addition to the obvious melodramatic allure of a cross-examination. Thomas Mitchell, Melville Cooper, Rene Ray and the others in the cast never fail to give it explicit expression. And Sir Cedric Hardwicke's direction, against a perfect Stewart Chaney setting, is superb.

* * *

The play is satirical as well as menacing. It starts with a staid engagement party of the port-and join-the-ladies' era and then proceeds to dissect the figures involved in terms of their own confessions. There is an inspector, to be sure, but the suicide which he is investigating does not occur until a brilliant epilogue. As each of the persons responsible for that suicide trap themselves into admissions of their guilt, "An Inspector Calls" becomes far more a play of character than one of random excitement. It is a pity that the whole show was not foreshortened to give it the impact which is implicit in the subject matter, but it is still something to see.

* * *

Keen acting was required to pull off this Priestley contemplation of sin and self-accusation. The Courtney Burr-Lassor H. Grosberg production has not lacked it. Mitchell, back from too long a seige in Hollywood, is wonderful as the fellow of the title. With quiet assurance, he dominates each fragment of a somber tale until the curious climax. Much of the time he is listening to the other players, but he does it with extraordinary distinction. Cooper is not far behind him as the newly rich manufacturer, whose discharge of an employee starts a tortuous train of events.

* * *

Meanwhile Rene Ray, who is making her first appearance here, is altogether convincing as the tycoon's daughter who refuses to conceal evil and John Buckmaster is excellent as her fiance, who tries to dismiss a whole inquisition as a hoax. Hardwicke has kept all of the performers in dynamic action, even when the script has given him little opportunity. "An Inspector Calls" is perhaps too languid for audiences gaited to American thrillers, but it has exciting substance.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 22, 1947

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By combining morality and mystery, J. B. Priestley has written a mild and ingenious little drama, "An Inspector Calls," which was acted at the Booth last evening. Looking back to 1912, when peace appeared eternal, Mr. Priestley has trapped some complacent British people into a series of nasty confessions. Before the evening is over, five representatives of the upper middle class acknowledge having committed acts that led to the suicide of an orphan. Particularly to the members of the younger generation this is a shocking realization, and they feel respectably guilty.

Mr. Priestley is a protean man of letters with strong moral convictions and the ability to perform equally well in different fields. Whether it is politics, the inequities of economic life or the Grand Canyon of Colorado, Mr. Priestley has the convictions, the sympathies and the insight to arouse a reader's interest. At his best, he also has a gift for portraying the characters of ordinary human beings with no pretentions to grandeur.

In "An Inspector Calls" he arouses a playgoer's interest by the technique of his story-telling. While a group of well-to-do Midlanders are congratulating each other on their virtue and security, a strange inspector drops in with the report of an obscure girl who has just concluded a miserable life by committing suicide. As the questioning proceeds, it appears that everyone present has contributed to her misfortune—one by discharging her from a job, another by leaving her stranded after a love affair, another by refusing to help her when she asked for assistance.

Since "An Inspector Calls" is a mystery play, it would be unfair to be more specific about the story. But it is fair to observe that Mr. Priestley's moral theme deserves something more vigorous than facile showmanship designed for an after-dinner lark in the theatre. Mr. Priestley's passions are so bold and his statement of them in the theatre is so tepid! Although "An Inspector Calls" sustains postprandial interest by a trick of technique, it dismisses you from the theatre with a feeling of having been politely swindled. As is frequently the case, Mr. Priestley is using the theatre like a doll's house to play clever tricks in.

In all conscience, the performance does not help him much. Under Cedric Hardwicke's direction, it has low blood pressure. Thomas Mitchell, as the quizzical inspector, hardly acts at all. He keeps his voice low to the point of inaudibility; he contributes little to the play except a relaxed standing posture. The others do better than that. René Ray, John Merivale and John Buckmaster make the conscience of the young generation sufficiently articulate, and Doris Lloyd contributes some ideas about well-bred complacence to the part of the mother. But it is Melville Cooper who brings most of the acting to this performance—acting that can be noticed, that is. As a bland, fatuous industrialist with no ideas at all, Mr. Cooper is immensely enjoyable. He keeps on the genteel side of caricature without forgetting that an actor is entitled to be interesting if he can.

* * *

As scene designer, Stewart Chaney has supplied an imposing drawing room, eminently restrained in the English tradition of 1912. As costumer, he has shrewdly provided Mr. Cooper with a dress shirt that impertinently bulges. Mr. Priestley's craftsmanship is so neat and studied that it is refreshing to watch a shirt buckle in the wrong places. Most of "An Inspector Calls" is too well behaved for a sinful man's enjoyment.

New York Post

OCTOBER 22, 1947

Thomas Mitchell Back In Priestley Drama

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

After the tumult of the recent drama, J. B. Priestley's "An Inspector Calls," which came to the Booth Theatre last night, seems a rather mild and uneventful work. Since he is a thoughtful and ingenious man, with an intelligent social conscience, Mr. Priestley has an interesting idea in mind and he manages it with considerable dexterity, keeping the material for a one-act play spinning expertly for an entire evening. In the process, however, a great deal of repetition is necessary, and, while I never found "An Inspector Calls" a bore, it does seem to cover the same ground a lot.

Here the British playwright is contemplating, with his usual sensitivity to moral values, the problem of human responsibility for the acts of others. Where John Donne told us that no man is an island, Priestley reminds us that not even the least of God's creatures can suffer injury without society bearing its share of the guilt. To dramatize his earnest contention he tells the story of an ex-factory girl who dies by her own hand, and of how a mysterious police inspector reveals to the members of a prosperous middle-class family their portion of the blame for her fate.

Its Ingenuity

The most interesting feature of "An Inspector Calls" as a play is its undoubted ingenuity in keeping its extremely few plot developments moving along with a considerable degree of effectiveness for three acts. The effect created is not exactly that of suspense, since the part each character has played in the poor Jones girl's suicide is soon pretty obvious. It is rather the result of a kind of technical admiration for the author's skill in making so much out of so little, mixed with the proper regard for his forthright dramatic earnestness and his gift for story-telling.

The main defect, as I have said, is repetition. The girl's tragic fate seems to be gone over again and again, and, despite the playwright's skill, he has not been successful in making each character's confession of blame add something new and enlightening to the story. For all the fine skill of Cedric Hardwicke's direction and the playing of an excellent cast, monotony too frequently develops, and it is on such occasions that the slenderness of Mr. Priestley's fable and the necessity for stretching it out become apparent.

Mr. Mitchell

There would be reason for welcoming the play if only because it brings back that admirable actor, Thomas Mitchell, after far too long an absence in Hollywood. It is pleasant to report that Mr. Mitchell returns, not as a kind of cinema spectacle but as the vivid, knowing and entirely engaging player he always has been, and that his portrait of the mysterious inspector who exposes the moral secrets of the Birling family is a fine and resourceful piece of work. I wish it were only embedded in a slightly more sturdy play.

Good as he is, Mr. Mitchell is by no means the only effective performer in the drama. Melville Cooper, as usual, is first-rate as the blustering factory owner who started the Jones girl on her road to suicide, and Doris Lloyd is excellent as the wife who helped complete the job. John Buckmaster and John Merrivale are helpful as two young men who contributed to the death, while a young English actress named Rene Ray is particularly good as the most contrite of the guilty ones. "An Inspector Calls" is interesting without being quite satisfying.

The Sun

OCTOBER 22, 1947

'An Inspector Calls,' Priestley's Parable, Repetitious, Somewhat Exhausting.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

J. B. Priestley is again skirting dangerous corners in his parable, "An Inspector Calls," an inquiry into hypocrisy and security and selfishness, put on last evening at the Booth. The production is offered by Courtney Burr and Lassor H. Grosberg and it puts a good actor, Thomas Mitchell, back to work in our town.

The Priestley exercises are absorbing enough through the first act, but after that the Booth's new play runs down, it goes in rather heavily for sermonizing, and becomes somewhat exhausting and repetitious. The omniscient visitor, the Inspector, is undoubtedly meant to be Conscience, and he brings reminders of "The Devil Passes" and "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." And of the Examiner in "Outward Bound."

"An Inspector Calls" presents, at its beginning, a smug family group in 1912—well-to-do, satisfied, secure, respectable — celebrating the engagement of the daughter of the house—and then Inspector Goole appears upon the scene. A factory girl has committed suicide and those of the dinner party are brought into it, one by one.

The girl was dismissed by the industrialist because she sought a scant increase in pay. She was later discharged from a shop on the complaint of the manufacturer's daughter. She had been the mistress of the daughter's fiance, had been seduced by the son of the house and had been denied help by the mother's charity committee.

And with all of this as the basis of his play, Priestley makes a heroine of the dead girl and criminals of each member of the supposedly respectable group as he blasts away at smugness and complacency. He shows his accustomed dexterity in the manipulation of a good deal of his material, but his play flounders after its good first act and it is often completely out of control.

Thomas Mitchell plays the Inspector with repression and quiet authority and reveals that he lost none of his excellent sense of timing during his years in the California gold fields. Melville Cooper, an expert and everlasting comedian, brings his sputtering and spluttering style to the role of the pompous, glib manufacturer, who turns to ebullience when logic won't save him. There are competent performances from Rene Ray, John Buckmaster, Doris Lloyd and John Merivale. Sir Cedric Hardwicke has directed well and Stewart Chaney has supplied a setting reflecting the prosperity of an untroubled world of the year 1912.

"An Inspector Calls" has its fascinating moments, but it definitely lets you down as it goes along.

Journal-American

OCTOBER 22, 1947

A Fascinating Drama Which Gets Mixed-Up

By ROBERT GARLAND

The new imported occupant of the Booth, from which another English export quite recently departed, is fascinating. The trouble is, "An Inspector Calls" grows less fascinating as it goes along. And the denouement—surprise! surprise!!—is dramatically confusing. But it's clever in a bookish sort of way.

Just before the final curtain falls beside the Shubert Alley, an on-stage telephone announces that an off-stage Miss Smith has gone to the trouble of killing herself all over again. This time there's no sure way of knowing whether The-Third-Floor - Back - In - Cops' - Clothing is on the level or—

Oh, well, you tell yourself, The Mysterious Stranger may be playing another practical joke on the big bad Birlings of Brumley. Having "had them," as they phrase it in the Midlands, once, why not "have them" for a second time. Inspector Goole finds mild messianic fun in badgering these Birlings.

And so do you—and I!

Unhurried Way

But, to us, it's fun that seems less funny as "An Inspector Calls" proceeds on its unhurried J. B. Priestley way. All right, you reassure yourself, these big bad Birlings of Brumley are, to put it nicely, no better than they should be. Reading from bad to worse, they're hard-boiled English eggs.

Arthur Birling is a tough employer who fires an honest working girl over a matter of three shillings. Sybil Birling is a tough housewife who refuses to give an unmarried mother succor. Sheila Birling is a tough debutante who has saleladies discharged because she's in a very nasty temper.

Eric Birling is a tough younger son who gets young women into what used to be known as trouble; who steals money from his father to get them out again. And Gerald Croft, fiance of the five-minute debutante, is a tough upper-class man who keeps himself a mistress. They're bad, these Birlings of Brumley . . .

Only Inspector Goole is good and tender.

Mixes Up Mixup

When I tell you that all these more - sinned - against-than-usual females are one and the same, that they're the off-stage Miss Smith who destroys herself twice in succession, I also tell you why the J. B. Priestley importation is dramatically confusing. Especially when a messenger with a message mixes up the mixup.

But, thanks to Cedric Hardwicke's unwavering direction, Stewart Chaney's fine North Midlands setting and a hand-picked cast that could not be bettered, "An Inspector Calls" is indeed, fascinating. But act by act—there're three—the fascination fades and the players carry on without it.

Thomas Mitchell is a welcome comer-home from Hollywood as the out-of-this-world Inspector. Melville Cooper is himself as Arthur. Doris Lloyd is a sadistic Sybil. Rene Ray and John Buckmaster are right enough as Sheila and Gerald. John Merivale is his father's son as Eric.

And that's as nice as I can be to this new importation!

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 22, 1947

'An Inspector Calls' New Sample Of Priestley's Tidy Plot-Making

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In a very acute essay on stories of crime and detection, Raymond Chandler observed some time back that "the English may not be the best writers in the world but they are the best dull writers." An excellent example is J. B. Priestley, whose "An Inspector Calls" was presented last evening at the Booth Theatre—and, far from wanting to complain, I mean this as an enthusiastic compliment.

Mr. Priestley likes to take "ord'n'ry" people, make them do and say "ord'n'ry" things — and somehow, ever so subtly, shape everything into a quite extr'ord'n'ry plot. You may remember that he did just this a dozen years ago with "Laburnum Grove," in which one never was sure whether Edmund Gwenn was a mild, pottering suburbanite or the craftiest of counterfeiters.

"An Inspector Calls" is a tidy, quietly humorous, excellently played exercise in holding an audience with a seeming minimum of effort. And, just when one might think that Mr. Priestley has got himself into trouble, he eludes the trouble by providing an eerie and titillating finish which I, for one, could not guess ahead of time. It

is a trick, fair enough—but I like to be fooled.

Not Murder—Suicide.

The inspector of the play, portrayed most ingratiatingly by Thomas Mitchell, calls upon the household of a stuffy businessman in an English industrial city in the year 1912. He has not come to detect crime. He has come because a girl has died in the infirmary from drinking disinfectant — just an ordinary girl, once a shop worker; once, or almost, at any rate, a prostitute.

Present are the head of the house, Arthur Birling; his wife, their son and daughter, and the daughter's fiance. All very respectable, nice people. It is inconceivable that any of them could have known the unfortunate suicide, much less have anything to do with her ultimate desperate act.

Yet, under the quiet questioning of the inspector, the story of the girl's life comes out, and each person in the house had something to do with it and its end. Each person, moreover, finds out things he never knew before about the other four.

A Good Company.

It is a slick little job, and, being an addict of the English police narrative, I like it very much. I like it for the way it has been staged by Cedric Hardwicke, who shuns heroics and hardly ever lets anybody raise his voice. I like it for the manner in which Mr. Priestley has made the action continuous; the whole story takes place between the hours of 8.50 and 10:50 P. M. in the Birlings' place in Brumley, so one does not have to bother about remembering whether or not the next act is "morning, about a month later."

And I like it for the way all of the actors work. Melville Cooper (who was the banana-eating relative in "Laburnum Grove") is capitally amusing as the bumbling, dullish head of the household. Doris Lloyd makes a believable tyrant as his wife. John Buckmaster, as the fiance, manages to confess a period of dalliance with considerable grace. Equally good are Rene Ray as the forthright daughter and John Merivale as the weakling son.

Mr. Mitchell's accent is not as British as some of the others', but he fits smoothly into the picture. It is pleasant indeed to have him back from Hollywood, and I hope there are enough of us who do not demand blood and thunder to keep him here for a good part of the season.

PM Evening

OCTOBER 23, 1947

Kronenberger

Too Tedious for a Stunt, Too Trivial for a Tract

J. B. Priestley is always bursting with "interesting" ideas—which may be why I so often find him an uninteresting playwright. For the idea, the technical trick, the clever twist not only obtrudes itself way past its bedtime, but it obliterates all sense of flesh-and-blood, all our incentive to believe, all our capacity for caring. Anything so tricky can hardly help seeming, after a time, a little trashy. Anything so tricky, again, is very likely to conceal something a little trite.

* * *

The trickiness, this time, doesn't even conceal the triteness—though very likely it's not meant to. Very likely it's only meant to give it a new sheen or gloss. Mr. Priestley has merely hung enough bells on a tract to try to make it tinkle like a theater piece—and come up with a quite unexpected, fairly catchy little tune at the end. Mr. Priestley has merely done his best to make a serious subject palatable. But in the course of being made (or not being made) palatable, it comes to seem pretty piffling.

* * *

Mr. Priestley, who has a very real social conscience, is concerned in *An Inspector Calls* with everybody's involvement — and often guilty involvement—in other people's lives. For a specific fable, he has had a mysterious police inspector call at the home of a smug, successful manufacturer and implicate everybody there in a young girl's suicide. Father had once fired her from his factory; daughter had later got her dismissed from a dress shop; mother had refused her charitable aid; and the young son of the house, along with the prospective son-in-law . . . but perhaps we should leave their roles undivulged. Be assured, however, that they had most of all to do with hurrying the poor girl toward suicide.

* * *

In the thorough-going way in which this small family unit of five—plagued quite as much, surely, by coincidence as by guilt—drove one poor girl to her grave, there is much that smacks strongly of the Victorian morality play at its worst. Mr. Priestley, being quite as aware of it as you or I, suddenly does a backflip on the whole business, suggesting near the end that maybe the inspector had been having the family on, or hadn't even been an inspector, or . . . but again I will leave something up Mr. Priestley's sleeve. I would only say that all these final fillips, however momentarily enlivening, came much too late to make up for the tedium in which the play had been engulfed for a good act and a half. They largely, too, destroyed any claims the play might have to being taken very seriously. The tract had merely wound up a stunt; something pretty dull stood forth as also pretty trivial.

* * *

The production is pleasant enough without ever being very exciting. It brings Thomas Mitchell back to Broadway, after a number of years in Hollywood, as the inspector; and Mr. Mitchell plays the inspector neatly and quietly, without too much suggestion that he may have spectral or supernatural affiliations. The family group —Melville Cooper, Doris Lloyd, Rene Ray, John Buckmaster and John Merivale—all acquit themselves very capably, and Stewart Chaney has housed them well. But Mr. Priestley has left them rather dangling.

—Louis Kronenberger

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 22, 1947

'An Inspector Calls' Is A Confused Fantasy

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

With "An Inspector Calls," J. B. Priestley propounds a fairly modern disdain for the Golden Rule. His play is told in terms of a mystic warning that recalls the technique of earlier works of his, more inately concerned with recurring time cycles.

Although the pattern of action here, except for the last half hour, follows an apparent form, the play has subdued suspense.

A police inspector calls on the English family of a manufacturer who is hoping for a knighthood. It is spring, 1912, and they are celebrating his daughter's engagement to a young aristocrat of the city.

Girl Commits Suicide.

The inspector is inquiring into the background of a young girl who has committed suicide. To each of them separately he shows a picture of the girl, and draws from them the guilty contribution each has made to the girl's desolation.

These comfortably off people are smugly secure in their class superiority. None of them has any sense of obligation toward anyone else and Mr. Birling, head of the house, asserts that the only worthy code of living is taking care of one's self.

He has dismissed the girl for taking part in a strike. His daughter has had her discharged from a shop. His son and future son-in-law have further contributed to the girl's degradation, and his wife has whimsically refused her help in her desperation.

Saving Face.

When the inspector leaves, the parents are only interested in saving face. Their children are shaken by the unanimous confession.

In the recapitulation of their interviews they conclude that the girl never existed and that they have been deluded by an imposter into thinking their separate ruthlessness concerned one person.

At the end there is every promise that their rationalization will

be proven false. And there is some hope that the shock and very lack of explanation for the evening's events may jolt the parents into a sense of charity the children have acquired. For into the midst of their smug defenses, comes news that a real inspector is arriving.

The play is not entirely satisfying, perhaps because it is bald fantasy told in terms of physical reality. Explanations of coincidences, and the inspector's motives and identity are left to the listener.

Unreality Intensified.

The period of the play intensifies its unreality. The English setting confuses, as it exposes the conscience of people living in a world of financial and social cleavages that are presumably disappearing.

The guilt the author describes exists today and anywhere, and the aptly useful pressures of the setting he chose makes that guilt seem special and remote.

Thomas Mitchell returns from a long session with pictures to play the inspector. He gives a well thought out performance despite not being ideally cast.

Gentle Modulations.

The role is written with gentle modulations and Mr. Mitchell's technique seems refined and repressed by the camera. The characterization does not project with any great conviction.

Melville Cooper is excellent as the cocksure Birling, whom he makes patronizing, smug and ridiculously ordinary. As his wife, Doris Lloyd is equally authentic.

Rene Ray is effective and assured in the more complex role of the daughter who alone senses the mysterious influence of the stranger. John Buckmaster gives the best performance on his local record as the aristocratic transgressor, and John Merivale does handsomely by the weakling son of the family.

"Medea"

New York Post

OCTOBER 21, 1947

Judith Anderson Superb In Jeffers' 'Medea'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Judith Anderson, who is the most brilliant of American actresses, is at the peak of her powers in the Robinson Jeffers version of Euripides' "Medea," which opened at the National Theatre last night. To those who saw Miss Anderson in "Macbeth" or "Family Portrait" or any of a half dozen of her earlier plays this will suggest a passionate dramatic intensity and a depth of heroic emotion seldom seen on the modern stage, which is just what I intend it to mean. Here is a performance of such scope and forcefulness, of such boldness of imagination, that it is not likely to be forgotten by anyone who witnesses it.

It is the courage of Miss Anderson's conception which first arouses admiration, and then the enormous skill with which she carries it off. In a day when actors, trained in a realistic theatre, are afraid of emotional violence, she lashes into a veritable fury of tempestuous passions, without ever letting it get out of hand. There is something overwhelming about the range of her elemental frenzy of hatred and vengeance, something beyond humanity in the sense of terror it creates and completely human in the proud and tragic spirit that lies beneath the tortured emotions.

In one scene her Medea can be proud, terrible, fiendish, primitively evil, pitiful, filled with love for her children and inexorable hatred for her husband. Visually magnificent, she can be hideous, beautiful, frightening and infinitely sorrowful in appearance as in manner, creating at once pity and terror in a mood of classic tragedy rare in our drama. Hers is a portrayal as much in the heroic tradition as was Laurence Olivier's memorable Oedipus of two seasons ago, and every bit as distinguished.

As for Mr. Jeffers' faithful but not literal adaptation of Euripides, it is all the more welcome after the unhappiness created by the eminent poet's unfortunate "Dear Judas." Where that theatrical misfortune left doubt as to not only the author's dramatic sense but his lyric talent as well, the simple, direct, striking and eloquent verse of his "Medea" is both dramatically and poetically satisfying. It is in just the right mood for the stark retelling of the memorable story of the mother whose hatred was so much greater than her love.

Mr. Gielgud

The drama has been staged with great skill and intelligence by John Gielgud, who deserves immense credit for handling it with such simplicity and understanding. It cannot be said, however, that Mr. Gielgud is equally happy in the role of Jason. It is a part decidedly secondary to Miss Anderson's Medea, and, although he manages it with pictorial effectiveness, his reading seems colorless and undistinguished in each of his scenes.

Florence Reed plays the small but important part of the nurse with proper effectiveness, while Grace Mills, Kathryn Grill and Leone Wilson represent the chorus with moving excellence. The sets by Ben Edwards, the costumes by Castillo, and the lighting by Peggy Clark add handsomely to the mood of the tragedy. But the evening, of course, is Miss Anderson's, and her remarkable playing is one of the triumphs of this or any other season. This unusual year in the theatre continues at a breath-taking pace.

'MEDEA.'

Freely adapted from the "Medea" of Euripides by Robinson Jeffers; staged by John Gielgud; settings by Ben Edwards; costumes by Castillo; lighting by Peggy Clark; original music and scoring by Tibor Serly; presented by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea at the National Theater Monday evening, October 20, 1947. The cast:

The Nurse ..... Florence Reed
The Tutor ..... Don McHenry
The Children ..... Gene Lee, Peter Moss
First Woman of Corinth ..... Grace Mills
Second Woman of Corinth ..... Kathryn Grill
Third Woman of Corinth ..... Leone Wilson
Medea ..... Judith Anderson
Creon ..... Albert Hecht
Jason ..... John Gielgud
Aegeus ..... Hugh Franklin
Jason's Slave ..... Richard Hylton
Attendants to Medea ..... Martha Downes, Marian Seldes
Soldiers ..... Ben Morse, Jon Dawson, Richard Boone, Dennis McCarthy

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play occurs before Medea's house in Corinth.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 21, 1947

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If Medea does not entirely understand every aspect of her whirling character, she would do well to consult Judith Anderson. For Miss Anderson understands the character more thoroughly than Medea, Euripides or the scholars, and it would be useless now for anyone else to attempt the part. Using a new text by Robinson Jeffers, she set a landmark in the theatre at the National last evening, where she gave a burning performance in a savage part.

Mr. Jeffers' "free adaptation," as it is called, spares the supernatural bogeymen of the classical Greek drama and gets on briskly with the terrifying story of a woman obsessed with revenge. His verse is modern; his words are sharp and vivid, and his text does not worship gods that are dead.

* * *

Since Miss Anderson is a modern, the Jeffers text suits her perfectly and releases a torrent of acting incomparable for passion and scope. Miss Anderson's Medea is mad with the fury of a woman of rare stature. She is barbaric by inheritance, but she has heroic strength and vibrant perceptions. Animal-like in her physical reactions, she plots the doom of her enemies with the intelligence of a priestess of black magic—at once obscene and inspired. Between those two poles she fills the evening with fire, horror, rage and character. Although Miss Anderson has left some memorable marks on great women in the theatre, Medea has summoned all her powers as an actress. Now everyone realizes that she has been destined for Medea from the start.

* * *

The general performance and the production are all of a piece. As the nurse, Florence Reed is giving an eminent performance that conveys the weariness and apprehensions of a devoted servant who does not quarrel with fate. John Gielgud's Jason is a lucid, solemn egotist well expressed in terms of the theatre. As Creon, Albert Hecht has the commanding voice and the imperiousness of a working monarch. The chorus of women, which has been refreshingly arranged in Mr. Gielgud's unhackneyed direction, is well acted by Grace Mills, Kathryn Grill and Leone Wilson. The parts of the two young sons are disarmingly represented in the guileless acting of Gene Lee and Peter Moss. Hugh Franklin as Aegeus and Don McHenry as the Tutor give agreeable performances, innocent of the stuffiness peculiar to most classical productions.

* * *

Ben Edwards' setting of the doorway to a Greek house is no more than pedestrian designing, although Peggy Clark has lighted it dramatically, and Castillo has dressed the characters well. Your correspondent could do very well without the conventional theatrical effects—the lightning and the surf especially, for, unlike the acting, they derive from the old-fashioned theatre of rant and ham.

Out of respect for Miss Anderson's magnificent acting in this incarnadined drama, they ought to be locked up in the lumber room. For she has freed Medea from all the old traditions as if the character had just been created. Perhaps that is exactly what has happened. Perhaps Medea was never fully created until Miss Anderson breathed immortal fire into it last evening.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 21, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Miss Anderson's Medea

A SUPERLATIVE performance by Judith Anderson is the chief distinction of "Medea," a free adaptation of the Euripides tragedy by Robinson Jeffers, which has come to the National Theater. Rarely has an actress so richly deserved the dedication which the eminent poet accorded her in the published play. She gives his lines a singing fury and a vibrant translation into stage action worthy of a more dynamic production. Unfortunately, the John Gielgud staging of the piece, and his portrayal of the all-important opposing role of Jason, leaves the work more declamatory than melodramatic.

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To count blessings first, let it be noted that Miss Anderson is given vast assistance by Florence Reed, as the nurse who suckled her in Asia and accompanied her through a wild series of tribulations to a double infanticide in an inhospitable Corinth. When the two feminine stars are on stage, giving the Jeffers's lines their full poetic and evocative quality, "Medea" has the stuff of splendor. Since the physical production leaves little to be desired, there is a rare quality about this offering which gives classic tragedy its rightful eminence in our current theater. It is only a pity that poetic blood and thunder does not hold up at the National.

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It is Gielgud who fails this valiant venture. As the seeker of the golden fleece, who betrays Medea for the comely daughter of Creon and finds himself in a terrible web of vengeance, he has neither the force nor the imagination to make the piece more than a rather tedious reconstruction of high words and savage events. For a brief moment, when he is interceding in Medea's behalf and she tells him, "we have had too much wrath and our acts are closing on us"there is the intolerable suspense of great melodrama. Too much of the time he is phrasing the dialogue of the Jeffers adaptation with more exactitude than excitement.

* * *

Meanwhile, his staging is far from effective. The choruses of the drama are fine when they are in movement or speaking, with Grace Mills giving a particular good account of herself, but they are too often left forgotten backstage. The powerful notes in "Medea" are struck by Miss Anderson and Miss Reed. Without any obvious direction, they give point and poignancy to a sinister and terrible transcription of an ancient drama. There is something to stir one deeply in "Medea," but the violence is blanketed in set speeches and set stage effects.

The Sun

OCTOBER 21, 1947

'Medea' a Harrowing Drama, Magnificently Played by Judith Anderson.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

They went back a few years for last night's play, all the way back to Euripides of 431 B. C., for "Medea," a gory and snarling tragedy, played for all its shocks and shudders by an excellent cast upon the stage of the National. It is a play of fire and fury and Judith Anderson distinguishes herself with a powerful performance.

"Medea" provides an evening of sustained horror. It offers perfidy, anguish, denunciation, violence, child murder and as much lamentation as the theater ever got in the oldtime, popular-priced thrillers. But it also has dignity and eloquence. There is a beauty of language in the Robinson Jeffers adaptation, and Miss Anderson is always there to keep the excitement at a high pitch and to remind that she has extraordinary skill. A great actress, really, and there should be no hesitancy in saying so.

John Gielgud has staged this Grecian tragedy as an exciting theater piece. It is played by a company that gives appreciation and enunciation to the Jeffers verse, and the Corinthian setting of Ben Edwards, with its mighty columns, its wide sweep of steps and its huge doors, is impressive.

"Medea" tells its story of the revenge sought and achieved by a demoniacal Medea after she has been discarded by her treacherous husband, Jason, who takes as his bride the fair young daughter of the ruler of Corinth. Banishment is ordered for the wretched Medea, but she gets a day's stay and goes briskly about her carnage, murdering Jason's wife and Creon by means of gifts of a gold cloak and a coronet of vine leaves, and then slaughtering her own two children.

Judith Anderson is magnificent as Medea, a creature of fury and despair. There is great variety in her playing as she projects the swiftly changing moods of a tormented woman obsessed with a craving for revenge. John Gielgud is singularly moving as the faithless Jason, which is actually a secondary role. There is eloquence from Albert Hecht as the inexorable Creon and from Florence Reed as the suffering Nurse. Hugh Franklin goes a great deal for the role of Aegeus, who offers the bandished Medea sanctuary in Athens. And there is effective reading from Grace Mills, Kathryn Grill and Leone Wilson as the women of Corinth.

"Medea" is a sanguinary play, one of soaring verse, and given some brilliant acting. Judith Anderson should not be allowed to remain idle for another season, another month, in all the years of her life. "Medea," brought along by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea, is another fine contribution to the suddenly vital New York theater.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 21, 1947

'Media' of Jeffers Lacks Unity

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Robinson Jeffers' free adaptation of Euripides' "Medea," which Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea brought to the National Theatre last evening, is eloquent, verbose and shifts the original emphasis as did Maxwell Anderson's even more free adaptation, "Winged Victory."

Anderson emphasized the unhappiness of an exotic woman brought to a stern, strange community. Jeffers emphasizes the revenge that Medea exacted from ambitious Jason, when he deserted her and their two sons to wed the daughter of King Creon of Corinth.

Jeffers' Medea is a maddened Asiatic, a snarling foaming, fiery creature, who resorts to the wild ways of her native Colchis, shrivels Creon and her rival with magic crown and gown, kills her sons.

Though Euripides has been accused of lacking the pure classicity of Aeschuylus and Sophocles, he was not one to be so repetitious and flowery as Jeffers would make him seem. And he certainly would have done some judicious cutting to obviate an intermission.

John Gielgud, who directed, has been no more successful in achieving unity and conciseness than has adaptor Jeffers. The performances are keyed in several styles, and some of them change pitch during the evening.

Judith Anderson, a truly great actress, gives an overpowering performance in the title role, but it is a performance notable for a lack of discipline and restraint. She roars grandly, slips into realistic modernism, lunges over into sinuous sexterity. But "economy of means" are three words that elude her almost completely.

Florence Reed, another great actress, is more restrained in gesture and speech as the Nurse, but there were times when she appeared baffled by Gielgud's coaching. Gielgud's Jason is stentorian and one-toned.

The supporting cast acts with something smacking of the naturalism of our present day stage. There are good, honest contributions by Grace Mills, Kathryn Grill, Leone Wilson, Albert Hecht, Hugh Franklin and Don McHenry. Gene Lee and Peter Moss enjoyed themselves hugely as the hapless children. They didn't blink an eyelash at a single terrible shriek.

"Medea" is definitely inferior to the Old Vic's "Oedipus" but it has some stunning moments. It is fascinating to watch and hear Miss Anderson, even when she makes mistakes. She and Miss Reed possess awesome authority and technical brilliance.

"Medea" is not for the Mr. and Mrs. Average Playgoer, pleasure and escape bent.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 21, 1947

Judith Anderson Sets New High in 'Medea'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The "Medea" Robinson Jeffers adapted from Euripides, which Judith Anderson is now playing, is the kind of part which every woman who ever acted must dream of finding. It is questionable whether any actress ever more deserved finding it.

This role begins on a pitch of great emotional intensity. It rises to heights that surpass endurance.

Miss Anderson has resource and power that are unequaled in our theater. She portrays these passions with unfaltering magnificence, beyond a point where an onlooker is left stunned and numb.

Medea is an Asiatic princess married to the Greek, Jason. There is no perfidy she has not committed for him. A trail of blood and dishonor prevents her ever returning home.

Cast Off by Jason.

Jason has cast her off with her two children, to marry the daughter of the King, Creon, and gain himself wealth and power.

Medea's hatred is as overpowering as her love. As the play opens, her voice comes out of her rude stone house by the sea like the sound of an animal in incurable pain.

Her bitterness is consuming her when Creon comes to tell her he will banish her and her children because he fears her hatred of his family. They will be persecuted wanderers.

Here Miss Anderson's Medea becomes a human lynx. With contorted neck and wildly sly eyes she suggests there is no evil of which she is incapable. Still shrewdly feminine she demeans herself to him, appealing for time.

Vengeful Madness.

Though plainly apprehensive of her reputed occult power, he weakens. She may stay one day.

When Jason claims he has married to honor his sons, new loathing completes her vengeful madness.

She is promised a haven from banishment in Athens by Aegeus, whose sterility she agrees to cure. But no such physical solace for her woes can stay her real intent.

She contrives a hideous end for the king and his daughter, and murders her sons to wipe out the last pride or happiness Jason might have left on earth.

The most ingenious richness of Miss Anderson's performance lies in her never letting Medea become lunatic. This is a woman of violent capacities. Even when she is loathsomely animal, caught in inhuman frenzies, she is driven by motives that are inherently clear to her.

She is not normal, but she is a woman whose endowment for any zeal is titanic.

Vivid Pantomime.

Miss Anderson uses her voice with shockingly varied effect, and her body delineates her passions in vivid pantomime. In the moment of paroxysm when she knows her vengeance on Jason's wife is complete, and again when she writhes in ecstatic fulfillment at the nurse's description of the vile death, she is a great dramatic dancer.

"Medea" is a terrific challenge to an actress. Miss Anderson has met the challenge with magnificence.

John Gielgud, as Jason, has a fine scene of horror when his cast-off wife delivers her final blow, and Florence Reed is as natural and powerful as granite as the nurse. Grace Mills and the others provide a most efficient supporting cast.

The truth is, though, that when Miss Anderson is on the stage, whether she is speaking or not, it is difficult to remember just who is there with her. She is on most of the time.

It is tragic that our theatrical literature can so seldom provide a talent like this one the material to suit its scope.

Journal-American

OCTOBER 21, 1947

431 B.C. Play a Triumph For Judith Anderson

By ROBERT GARLAND

This, remember, was to have been the winter of our Broadway discontent. This, I need not remind you, was penciled in as the season in which a dying theatre at long last expired.

The movies, the radio and the phonograph; the Shuberts, the unions and the critics, were to have driven the fabulous invalid into its expectant grave.

Yet, with 1947-1948 still in its infancy, we have "Command Decision" at the Fulton, "Man and Superman" at the Alvin, "The Heiress" at the Biltmore and, whether you find them irresistible or not, "Allegro" at the Majestic and "High Button Shoes" at the Century. None is theatre of which to be ashamed. The majority is theatre to make you proud.

And now, to rise above them all, comes the Robert Whitehead-Oliver Rea production of the Euripides "Medea" in the "free adaptation" Robinson Jeffers made for, and dedicated to, Judith Anderson. Last night, at the National, the theatre put its calamity howlers to flight as the neglected art of uninhibited "r o u n d acting" came into its own again.

In shorter and less fumbling words, "Medea" with Miss Anderson is magnificent. And in Roget's Thesaurus, "magnificent" is the equal of brilliant, splendorous and, to speak right out, superb.

* * *

Great Performance

Why not? Here's a play, one of the world's greatest. And a performance worthy of it. And a production worthy of that performance. Given these things and an adaptation in which the soaring drive of the 431 B. C. original comes through miraculously and you've got the "Medea" according to last night's premiere.

Robinson Jeffers has strayed but slightly from the Corinthian history of Jason and Medea as related by Euripides out of an obscure Greek dramatist, unknown as Neophron. He has—wisely, it seems—n e i t h e r avoided nor stressed the piece's witchcraft and the magic chariot of the tortured one's escape is left waiting at the gate.

As it stands now at the National, "Medea" is first, last and always a melodrama of revenge. Hell having no fury like a woman scorned, Jason's cast-off lady is mad with scorn and jealousy, love and frustration. Her's is an illness of the mind, brought about and aggravated by an illness of the soul . . .

In the literal meaning of the term, Medea is beside herself throughout the play. And, as she calms down to understate it, she is certainly not without some provocation.

Grandiosity Revived

Judith Anderson projects Medea the only way Medea can be projected. Her performance is in the old and honorable school of a Siddons or a Cushman, a Rachel or a Ristori, an Anglin or, if Miss Anglin will forgive me, a von Volkenburg. Here is acting a la Bernhardt. Miss Anderson has restored its grandiose vitality.

Not before has Judith Anderson looked so beautiful. To Medea she brings a comeliness of face, body and integrity. She could so easily play her goddess of vengeance down, underacting because underacting is now the stylish thing to do. But the Euripides melodrama of revenge is not for underacting. So Miss Anderson lets herself go—to triumph!

Florence Reed is a truly harrowed Nurse. Her relation of the death of "the yellow-haired child of Creon" brings down the house with horror-into-cheers. John Gielgud's Jason is, at least, unhackneyed. And, at most, impressive. Grace Mills, as the First Woman of Corinth, is excellent. Almost so is Albert Hecht as Creon. Ben Edwards' set is fitting.

What you take from this old, yet ever new "Medea" depends on what you bring. I, for one, take the glory that is Judith Anderson, her play and her players. And in the order named!